

Adequate Nutrient Intakes to Support Healthy Immune System Against Covid-19

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Despite the good news of having a decline in new cases, Indonesia, and the world in general, cannot just lower its guard as several reports reveal the discovery of various new Covid-19 strains. As for Indonesia, the decrease in number is still quite worrying as the number of testing also drops. Hence, apart from getting the vaccination, people still have to follow health protocols and avoid unnecessary travel.

UGM nutritionist Dr. Toto Sudargo recommended people consume good and adequate nutrition to help boost their immune systems. As the virus kept mutating, we had yet to ensure whether the vaccine would be effective against the new variants.

A healthy immune system functions as a strong protector for humans from any infection caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. To obtain such, people need to consume adequate intakes to meet their daily nutrient needs and thus function optimally and avoid getting an infection.

“During infection, there will be an increase in energy demand, meaning we have to increase our intake for optimal immune system activation,” he said at UGM Faculty of Medicine, Public Health,

and Nursing, Tuesday (23/2).

Though many Indonesians tend to consume inadequate nutrition than they are supposed to because of socioeconomic factors, unequal availability of food, and lack of education about good nutrition, essential nutrients should at least be fulfilled. High consumption of fruits and vegetables is also necessary as their vitamins and minerals (vitamin C, E, A, and others) can directly affect the immune system.

“Fiber intake, which is often lacking in our society, needs attention. Fiber is a source of prebiotics, food for good microbiota (probiotics) in the digestive system. The balance of bacteria in the digestive system can send signals and affect the body’s immune system,” Toto said.

Diversifying food can be an alternative. A nutritional balance consisting of macro and micronutrients is available in some more affordable food, such as obtaining protein from eggs and vegetables (e.g., tempeh and tofu) instead of meat. Tofu contains zinc as much as 72 percent of the zinc in meat per 100 grams. It is an essential nutrient that can inhibit the synthesis and replication of the virus and increase the body’s defense system. For carbohydrates, food like cassava, tubers, and corn can be of rice replacement. Papayas can be the source of vitamin C besides oranges and lemons.

“Consuming salt-water fish is also highly recommended. It is an affordable antiviral food alternative containing protein, essential amino acids, and fatty acids that can prevent viral replication,” he explained.

Lastly, Toto highlighted that processing food could affect nutrition, like vitamin C and B that could be damaged or reduced when heated. Thus, he recommended people steam rather than boil, consume the soup or broth, and not overcook meat or fish to avoid nutrient loss.

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